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ABSTRACT

This guide provides information about the services available to schools through the High Schools That Work (HSTW) and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) and how to build a strong support network for teachers and schools. The following topics are covered: (1) the benefits of networking; (2) the link between networking and HSTW services; (3 services from the SREB and the states, including yearly action plans, staff development, assessment, technical assistance, and curriculum development; (4) the role of the HSTW state coordinator; (5) the role of a district coordinator or "coach"; (6) the role of a HSTW site coordinator; (7) the relationship between the site coordinator and the principal; and (8) using technology to network. Examples from HSTW states and sites are provided. (KC)

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Networking and Support Services for Comprehensive School Improvement

A Guide for *High Schools That Work* Sites

High Schools That Work is a research-based school improvement initiative that links more than 850 schools and school systems in 22 states in raising the achievement of all students, particularly students who have been underserved in the past.[1] Schools in the *HSTW* network implement 10 key practices for changing what is expected of students, what they are taught, how they are taught, and how teachers relate to each other and to students, parents and the community.

Because major changes in curriculum and instruction take time, the SREB asks *HSTW* sites to commit to five years of improvement efforts. Meanwhile, teachers, counselors and school leaders need constant encouragement and support to sustain their efforts. In addition to services provided by the SREB, states and school districts, a large portion of this support comes from networking — the ongoing process of teachers and school leaders getting together with their peers to learn, share information and solve problems associated with change.

Networking creates awareness and understanding of the need to change. It gives site leaders and teachers "critical friends" to consult for guidance and practical advice and helps them see what can happen when a school uses the *HSTW* framework of goals and key practices to guide improvement.

Teacher commitment to school improvement is vital. The SREB asks schools to involve the entire faculty — academic as well as vocational teachers — in working together to change school and classroom practices. Networking gives teachers a sense of "ownership" in improving their schools and a belief that their efforts can make a difference.

New sites progress more rapidly as a result of networking with experienced sites, while mature sites benefit from opportunities to compare their efforts with those of the most-improved schools.

Networks benefit schools by:

- Fostering a common vision of high standards for and high achievement by all students;
- Providing an array of practical ideas based on the experiences of successful teachers and administrators;
- Minimizing duplication of effort by enabling a school to adopt and improve upon a practice that has worked in another school;
- Building the capacity of school leaders to improve curricula and instruction;
- Dispelling the notion that schools and teachers are "out there all alone" to make needed changes;
- Energizing teachers and school leaders to do more to raise student achievement;
- Giving teachers time for personal reflection that can lead to new insights;
- Providing an informal way to explore how new ideas have worked in other schools before trying them out;
- Offering cost-effective services;

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1 These students are the 60 percent to 65 percent of high school youths who plan to work, enroll in a two-year technical or community college, attend a four-year college or university with an open admissions policy, or enter the military after high school graduation.

- Enabling high schools to use lessons learned by others in order to make progress more rapidly than earlier sites;
- Saving time and resources;
- Giving teachers opportunities to "learn from the best";
- Providing information on innovative methods and materials; and
- Connecting schools with the SREB and state programs and services.

The Link Between Networking and *HSTW* Services

The "marriage" of networking and services is an obvious union in helping *HSTW* sites improve. The SREB and the states actively provide services and create networking opportunities for new and existing *HSTW* sites.

HSTW services focus on the issues involved in schoolwide change and recognize that teacher development is vital. In working with the network of *HSTW* sites, the SREB has learned that:

- Teachers need extensive help in developing new ways of thinking and teaching. They need a clear vision, guidelines and models for change, administrative support, staff development, technical assistance, data, and communication with others.
- Implementing the key practices is not a one-time event. New sites need constant orientation and encouragement, while developing sites need to learn about further actions they can take to improve student learning. Schools' efforts to raise student achievement must be nurtured constantly so that school leaders and teachers don't lose sight of the importance of higher standards.
- The road to change can be rocky. School leaders have success when they create an atmosphere in which academic and vocational teachers can exchange ideas freely and develop new skills for teaching a more rigorous academic and vocational curriculum to more students.

Services from the SREB and the States

The SREB's contributions to school improvement include a vision of higher academic achievement, a framework of key practices for achieving that vision, a recommended curriculum[2] for underserved high school students, on- and off-site technical assistance, a comprehensive staff-development plan, assessments to measure student achievement and the opinions of students and teachers, access to pace-setting schools and successful sites, publications on research findings and best practices, and ongoing communication. Networking is an integral part of each service.

The states' role is to provide technical assistance, staff development, information and publications, and a variety of face-to-face and electronic networking opportunities. The states secure funding for services and establish ties with individuals and organizations in and out of the state that can contribute to the progress of *HSTW* sites.

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[2] The SREB recommends that all students complete a program of study that includes at least four college-preparatory-level English courses; three mathematics courses, including two at the level of algebra, geometry or other high-level mathematics courses; three science courses, including two at the level of chemistry, physics or other high-level science courses; and four additional courses in an academic or a vocational concentration.

Kentucky's Comprehensive Approach to Networking and Other Services Pays Dividends in School Improvement

For the last four years, the Kentucky Department of Education has offered a statewide program of technical assistance, staff development and networking for *High Schools That Work* sites. Site coordinators say the activities have been outstanding in building the skills of academic and vocational teachers, motivating them to try new strategies and getting them to share successes with their colleagues at other schools. The activities include:

Technical assistance. Department of Education personnel have developed a process for conducting technical-assistance visits to schools involved in *HSTW*. Schools are visited annually during their first three years as sites. Prior to a visit, each school completes a self-study that is reviewed by the state Department of Education and members of the technical-assistance visit team. The team sends a follow-up report to the school after a visit.

Professional development. In addition to attending SREB staff-development activities and a statewide conference for *HSTW* sites in the summer, teams of teachers from Kentucky high schools participate in state-sponsored workshops on integrated academic and vocational studies and in summer institutes on helping teachers use real-life situations to teach academic concepts. The state Department of Education contracts with six Kentucky universities for their personnel to train teams of academic and vocational teachers in how to integrate academic and vocational studies and how to develop integrated lessons and units. The teams then return to their schools and help other teachers put the materials and practices to work in the classroom. The state Department of Education summarizes all of the lessons and units developed through this process and distributes them to high schools throughout the state.

The state also conducts summer institutes to strengthen teachers' skills in using applied methods to teach language arts, mathematics and science concepts. Presentations at the institute are given by teachers from throughout the state who excel at teaching students high-level content through real-world applications and are willing to share their effective techniques.

"A lot of informal networking takes place during these staff development events," said Rodney Kelly, director of the Division of Secondary Vocational Education in the Kentucky Department of Education. "Teachers get to know each other and begin to network with teachers from down the road and across the state. Many schools send teams to other schools to see what is happening that makes a difference for students."

Teachers praise the state's comprehensive plan for technical assistance, staff development and networking. Many cite data indicating that the plan is having a positive effect on student achievement in Kentucky.

To get sites off to a good start, the SREB and the states conduct specific activities and deliver specific services during the first three years. Most of these services are also available to sites throughout their membership in the network. The services and accompanying networking opportunities for the first three years include:

Year 1

A site development workshop to introduce new sites to the *HSTW* framework of goals and key practices. Site leaders and teachers receive an orientation to the *HSTW* goals and key practices, learn how to access and participate in *HSTW* services, examine data, write an action plan for school improvement and network with other schools. Teams that attend the workshop are composed of academic and vocational teachers, counselors, the school principal, district administrators and parents who learn how to involve the rest of the staff and the community in a schoolwide effort. During the conference, teachers from high-achieving sites share the lessons they have learned in implementing *HSTW* practices. They tell how they got started, the problems they encountered and how they solved them, the roles people have played, and what has been accomplished. Teams have time to reflect on what they are learning and to begin planning what to do when they return to their schools.

An action planning process. Teams leave the site development workshop with ideas and a deeper understanding of changes needed to improve student learning. Each team returns to school prepared to engage other faculty members, parents and community leaders in developing an action plan customized for that school. The SREB provides data and information for sites to use in developing and updating their plans. By engaging others at the site in next-step planning, a smart leader at a school site gains the broad understanding and support necessary to change school and classroom practices.

Technical assistance. Experienced representatives from successful *HSTW* sites are enlisted to "coach" schools in how to translate action plans into curriculum and instructional change. New sites are linked to sites that are making progress in raising student achievement or improving some aspect of curriculum or instruction.

Staff development. Teachers need opportunities to learn from experts and those involved in *HSTW* practices, examine topics in depth, meet with colleagues from their schools and other schools, and develop ways to put new knowledge to work. They particularly need six to eight days per year of site-focused staff development to address special needs in implementing the *HSTW* key practices.

The SREB offers a "menu" of staff development services on site-specific topics, such as:

- Using academic and skill standards to plan challenging projects that integrate academic and vocational studies;
- Identifying indicators for increased student performance;
- Teaching algebra and geometry to all students;
- Teaching college preparatory English to students enrolled in basic or general English;
- Integrating college preparatory science with school- and work-based technical studies;
- Developing academic and career/technical course syllabi aligned to national standards;
- Assessing students in ways that will motivate them to achieve at a higher level;
- Designing a high school around small learning communities;
- Connecting school-based and work-based learning;
- Involving parents and teachers in getting students to complete a challenging program of study; and
- Engaging students in completing challenging projects.

In addition to attending workshops, site personnel may get together for staff development at faculty retreats, through interactive videoconferences and in phone conference calls with school improvement experts and successful site leaders.

The SREB's year-round staff development plan is based on assessment data, the *HSTW* teacher survey, technical assistance reports and site annual reports. The program includes the annual Summer Staff Development Conference for more than 5,000 teachers, counselors and administrators from throughout the nation; workshops on topics such as writing vocational syllabi, improving instruction in mathematics and language arts, and placing teachers in the workplace; videotapes of school reform experts and successful site leaders; teleconferences on topics such as integrating academic and vocational studies and replacing the general track; and other video and print training materials.

The annual *HSTW* Summer Staff Development Conference encourages networking through workshops, sharing sessions, and state and team meetings. Some states assign veteran sites to help new sites get the most from the conference.

States offer staff development on various topics at state workshops and conferences and through interactive technology. For example, South Carolina conducts workshops on applying academic concepts to real life, and Alabama trains teachers to develop syllabi and lesson plans for vocational studies.

Local Leaders' Retreat. This annual event is designed to help school and district leaders manage change in order to improve student learning. It gives superintendents, principals and other leaders an opportunity to meet with their counterparts and with consultants who can help them.

Assessment. The SREB and the states help *HSTW* sites measure students' progress, students' course-taking patterns, and student and teacher opinions on school and classroom practices. The student assessment of reading, mathematics and science tells schools how their students are performing and how their schools measure up in relation to other schools in the network. Baseline data from the assessment mark the beginning of a school's efforts to improve and provide a way to gauge the school's progress in the program. A transcript study draws comparisons between student achievement and course-taking patterns. A follow-up survey gives youths a chance to say what they wish their schools and teachers had done differently in preparing them for the workplace and postsecondary education. The *HSTW* teacher survey identifies staff development needs and teachers' perceptions of school and classroom practices' effectiveness in providing access to challenging courses and instructional approaches that motivate students to work hard to meet higher expectations. Schools receive reports that enable them to compare students' performance and school experiences with those of students at other schools and at the highest-performing schools in the network.

A site participates in the full assessment in "even" years (1998, 2000, etc.) and has the option to participate in a modified assessment in "odd" years (1999, 2001, etc.). The scaled-down assessment is designed to help schools identify students who qualify for the *HSTW* Award of Educational Achievement. To qualify, a student must meet the *HSTW* performance goals in reading, mathematics and science and the *HSTW* curriculum goal of completing an upgraded academic core and a concentration in an academic or a vocational/technical field. The award is tangible evidence to employers and postsecondary institutions that the recipient excelled in high school.

Year 2

Technical assistance. Sites receive a formal technical-assistance visit in the second year and every three years thereafter. Qualified technical-assistance teams organized by the SREB and the states determine where a school is in the change process, what things it is doing well, what things it can build on, and what actions it needs to take to address major

challenges. A team's written and oral reports give the school a three-year design for continuing the school improvement momentum. The states provide follow-up services to help schools implement the suggested actions. Both the SREB and the states work with the sites to align future technical-assistance and staff-development efforts with the challenges the schools face.

Staff and curriculum development. Staff development opportunities such as the summer conference, national and state workshops, and the Local Leaders' Retreat continue to be available. Sites that conduct local staff-development activities can draw on the resources of the state and *HSTW*, including staff development packages provided by the SREB.

Assessment. Depending on the year (even or odd), the site participates in either a full assessment or a modified assessment aimed at identifying recipients of the *HSTW* Award of Educational Achievement. (See Year 1.)

Year 3

Schools use assessment reports and other data to update their action plans. They also receive follow-up technical-assistance services designed to meet the needs of maturing sites and participate in advanced levels of staff development. Depending on the year (even or odd), the site participates in either a full assessment or a scaled-down version. (See Years 1 and 2 above.)

The Role of the *HSTW* State Coordinator

Each *HSTW* state names one person or a team of people from the state department of education to serve as state *HSTW* coordinator(s). The responsibilities of this role are:

Keeping the vision alive. Over time, teachers and school leaders can get caught up in the practical details and problems of enacting the key practices and may lose the initial excitement and purpose of raising students' academic, technical and intellectual capacity. State coordinators play a vital role in sustaining the *HSTW* vision of higher standards and higher achievement. A state coordinator may decide to visit each site in the state at least once a year to meet with the principal and teachers to discuss school improvement issues and recommend ways to keep the ball rolling.

Understanding the organization and operation of school districts and local school sites. Effective coordinators know the types of students each site serves, the support each school receives from the central office, the key district and school leaders at each site, and each school's strengths and weaknesses in making needed changes.

Providing technical assistance. Coordinators produce materials, identify trainers or "coaches," arrange for technical assistance visits, and counsel school leaders and teachers by phone and in person. They also help the SREB identify pace-setting sites for teachers and administrators to visit and outstanding practices for sites to adopt. State coordinators conduct workshops to familiarize site leaders with how technical assistance visits work and to explain how to use data to improve school plans.

Offering staff development. States arrange for site leaders and teachers to participate in staff development on school improvement topics such as project-based learning, classroom assessment, improvement in vocational studies, guidance and advisement, work-based learning, extra help, and integrated academic and vocational studies. In delivering staff development, the state coordinator may plan and conduct workshops and conferences, purchase staff-development video packages, and arrange for statewide videoconference hookups.

Brokering services and information. Coordinators don't need to know everything, but they

need to know "who knows what" in helping sites build productive relationships. As schools implement the key practices, they develop unique strengths. By being aware of schools' strong and weak points, coordinators can help schools get the assistance they need. Coordinators also can identify *HSTW* staff-development providers who are qualified and willing to conduct staff development activities for schools, districts and states; university personnel with expertise in whole-school reform; and others who can serve as resources to *HSTW* sites.

Enlisting other staff members of the state department of education in providing services to sites. A state's effectiveness is multiplied tremendously when other state department of education staff members are involved in providing services to *HSTW* sites. These contact people may be from academic as well as vocational disciplines. States can involve staff members by including them on technical assistance teams; preparing them to lead technical assistance visits and to become a resource for the visited site in the future; and taking them to site development conferences to help new sites write their action plans.

The West Virginia Department of Education involves state staff from all divisions — academic as well as vocational — in bimonthly meetings to debrief after technical assistance visits and to decide on follow-up services and staff development activities. Some states enlist the help of state Board of Education members, representatives of postsecondary institutions and staff from regional centers established to provide services to school systems.

Managing service delivery to the sites. Coordinators make sure the SREB and the states are meeting the needs of schools in the network and that the schools are taking full advantage of the services. This responsibility involves coordinating technical assistance visits; supporting site teams to attend conferences and workshops; encouraging and supporting site-based staff development aimed at improving curriculum and instruction; arranging for sites to participate in assessment services; and making sure sites have access to copies of SREB and other useful publications. It also may involve organizing teams of educators to work with the site in carrying out its site action plan.

Helping sites focus on "things that matter." The SREB has identified 10 "things that matter" in raising student achievement and urges high schools to pay attention to these critical factors:

- Giving students access to college-preparatory-level academic courses taught to high standards;
- Providing quality vocational courses;
- Having students complete an upgraded academic core and a major;
- Engaging students in difficult assignments in all courses;
- Getting the "whole school" to support high expectations;
- Giving students extra help to meet higher standards;
- Having a guidance system in which every student is known by and "belongs to" a caring adult;
- Providing time and an organizational structure that allows teachers to work together;
- Aligning staff development with school-specific curriculum and instructional strategies;
- Making decisions about curriculum and instruction and getting everyone's support.

Serving as a researcher and consultant. Coordinators gather, synthesize and disseminate research findings and "lessons learned" by

schools in improving student achievement. They share this information through formal presentations, documents or personal consultation (being "on call").

Encouraging sites to network within the state. Each state provides a directory of sites at the beginning of the school year or when a site enters the network. Some states, such as Kentucky, publish special-interest directories that list sites doing a good job in a certain area, such as applied academic learning, integrated academic and vocational studies, or work-based learning. In Virginia, a helpful grid identifies the "best practices" of each *HSTW* site in the state. Such a grid enables sites to contact other schools that are doing a good job in a certain area. All states have begun identifying outstanding schools and spokespeople who can share insights with those new to the network and with colleagues who are struggling to improve student learning.

Planning and conducting conferences, workshops and meetings. State coordinators plan and present numerous events to bring site teams together to share ideas, discuss problems and receive updates. They determine what issues to address and what types of sessions to offer based on the sites' needs. Meetings and other events may include an annual state conference, statewide meetings of *HSTW* sites, staff development workshops and a workshop to teach site teams how to interpret and use assessment data in revising their action plans. These events are most successful when they feature teachers and leaders who have overcome obstacles in changing school and classroom practices. The information usually is presented during breakout sessions, round-table discussions of "best practices" and idea fairs. Holding meetings in various locations across the state spreads the travel time evenly throughout the network. Georgia's four regional consortia meet twice a year. The state coordinator in Kentucky meets with site coordinators quarterly, either in person or through a videoconference.

Producing newsletters and other publications. Most states publish newsletters for *HSTW* sites or place information about *HSTW* in other state publications. Many states produce publications that focus on site accomplishments. Louisiana created a series of instructional manuals that served as the basis for staff development. The manuals and the accompanying workshops were developed by groups of teachers from *HSTW* sites.

Virginia high schools benefit from a series of state-developed publications, including two site guides each year on needed topics such as business and industry involvement, career planning, and school and classroom practices that hold promise. Virginia also publishes integrated lesson plans and ideas from *HSTW* sites each year and has produced a guide for improving vocational programs. The publications contain the names of people in the schools who can provide more information.

Identifying pace-setting schools. These successful sites can serve as models and "mentors" for schools that are beginning or accelerating their improvement efforts.

Establishing a "mentoring" program. This approach to networking and support is practiced in states such as Texas, where "master" sites are assigned as partners with sites that need help.

Organizing networks for specific purposes. The state can facilitate networking among teachers who are committed to improve student learning in a particular discipline or field. In one state, a group was created to develop guidelines for student portfolios.

Keeping in touch with coordinators in other states. Coordinators need to keep abreast of new developments and new resources in other

states. *HSTW* conferences, workshops and board meetings enable coordinators to gather ideas and solutions that they can pass along to sites.

Connecting *HSTW* with other school-improvement efforts. The Massachusetts Department of Education offers a statewide network that enables *HSTW* site representatives to meet with representatives of schools involved in other improvement efforts. This approach allows *HSTW* teams to discuss challenges and share solutions with others working to improve schools.

Helping schools connect with postsecondary education and the business community. State-level contacts and actions can help pave the way for local schools to communicate better with postsecondary education representatives and business leaders to determine what knowledge and skills youths will need in the future.

Training district coordinators and site coordinators to guide school improvement at the local level. State coordinators are responsible for making sure district coordinators and site coordinators know their responsibilities in working with teachers and school leaders to change school and classroom practices.

The Role of a District Coordinator or "Coach"

A *High Schools That Work* coordinator who is based in the district office and is responsible for working with one or more *HSTW* sites faces particular challenges in mobilizing the entire district for school improvement.

These coordinators, or "coaches," give leadership to *HSTW* by:

- Creating conditions in which district, school and teacher leaders can collaborate to identify and solve problems;
- Getting the whole district to support an upgraded academic core and a major for all high school students;
- Facilitating changes in scheduling and curriculum aimed at advancing student achievement;
- Helping schools use the *HSTW* framework of goals and key practices to organize several school-improvement initiatives into a whole-school reform effort;
- Helping teachers and school leaders interpret and use data to develop and revise their school action plans;
- Attending meetings of *HSTW* teams at high schools in the district;
- Supporting site-specific staff development to help teachers align their practices with the school's goals for improving curriculum and instruction;
- Providing opportunities for school administrators to learn new leadership techniques;
- Coordinating technical assistance visits in the district and sending district representatives to technical assistance visits at schools outside the district, which can be valuable "learning experiences";
- Communicating regularly with the state and the SREB about how schools are progressing and the challenges they still face;
- Inviting those who have had success using *HSTW* to share strategies for school improvement;
- Sending a district team to SREB conferences and workshops;
- Promoting the sharing of ideas and activities districtwide;
- Recruiting representatives of the business community;

- Developing new materials;
- Securing print and video resources for use by the teachers; and
- Using technology to form a network of teachers and administrators inside and outside the district.

In Gloucester County, Va., all school improvement efforts are based on the *HSTW* key practices. Gloucester High School teachers who apply for staff development must tell how the event is connected to one or more key practices, how the new knowledge will be used to raise student achievement and how the information will be shared with other teachers. They use *HSTW* as a guide in explaining how their activities will support both school and personal goals that the state requires them to write.

The Role of a *HSTW* Site Coordinator

A coordinator for one *HSTW* site has day-to-day responsibility for keeping that school headed in the right direction. This person handles many tasks, including:

Organizing and energizing a school improvement team at the site. The team should comprise key academic and vocational teachers and administrators, guidance counselors, parents, and representatives of business, industry and postsecondary education. The coordinator at Woodville High School in Texas conducts a workshop for new teachers to get them on board before the school year begins.

Working with the team to prepare an action plan for implementing the key practices. The plan should be based on school and student data and should be updated regularly. It also should be shared with the entire school.

Arranging for site-specific staff development. Teachers should attend conferences and workshops that help them meet the school's needs in raising student achievement. They also should share what they learn with other teachers.

Coordinating technical assistance visits to the site. The coordinator works with teachers and administrators at the site and with the SREB or the state (as appropriate) to prepare for technical assistance visits. The coordinator also shares the challenges identified during the visit and works with the site team to address the challenges.

Hosting visits by teams from other schools who want to see successful practices in action. The host school provides demonstrations, presentations and materials that feature school achievement, lessons learned and effective teaching strategies.

Overseeing *HSTW* data-collection activities. This information includes results from the *HSTW* student assessment, the student follow-up study and the teacher survey.

Communicating with the SREB and the state about the progress being made and the challenges being addressed at the site. The coordinator is the main contact person at the site for matters dealing with *HSTW*. He or she also is responsible for notifying the SREB of changes in personnel listed in the *HSTW* directory and responding to requests for information concerning *HSTW* from the district, the state, the SREB and others.

Being an active member of a state and multistate network for sharing information and ideas. The coordinator leads the team to SREB conferences and workshops, state conferences and staff development activities, and district offerings. He or she also contacts other schools for information and success stories.

Regional Coordinator Helps New *HSTW* Sites Travel the Fast Track to School Improvement

Bill Lambert, the regional coordinator for school improvement in Cincinnati, Ohio, helps his *High Schools That Work* sites create "blueprints" for site-specific three- to five-year implementation plans. In doing so, he draws heavily on organizational development and systems-building techniques gained from years of experience at Procter & Gamble.

One of Lambert's first actions as a coordinator was to organize an executive committee of business leaders and educators with extensive experience in the change process. The committee became a catalyst to help high schools prepare students for the workplace and further education. One of the first steps was to adopt *High Schools That Work* as a model for school improvement. Committee members liked *HSTW*'s strong database that helps schools decide what to change and how, and its large network that helps schools connect with other schools and with experts in the community.

The executive committee devised a three-part process:

- **Raising awareness.** During the awareness phase, school leaders and teachers learn about *HSTW* through workshops and presentations on strategies such as block scheduling, curriculum development and integration of academic and vocational studies. They also visit exemplary schools to see effective practices in action.

- **Using a "fast-cycle" design.** In this phase, each school organizes a "design team" to write a school improvement plan in just 100 days. The team, led by the principal, includes teachers, counselors and representatives of the area vocational-technical center attended by students from the high school. The planning begins with a two-day retreat to bring teams together as a "learning community," clarify goals and encourage teamwork. The teams work on their plans one day a week and meet with the other teams once every two weeks throughout the process. Management experts from business and education help the teams devise ways to manage change in the schools.

  "Because we don't want to lose any time, we use a 'fast-cycle' change approach borrowed from business and industry," said Lambert. "We believe education can change at a faster pace. Too many kids have been lost already."

  The blueprint-writing process is rigorous. Team members complete assignments, make presentations and interview teachers and administrators from *HSTW* sites in other states.

Regional Coordinator Helps New *HSTW* Sites (continued)

As the plans are being developed, the teams conduct activities to keep the entire school abreast of what is going on. Because of this emphasis on communication, the big job of "selling" the staff on the value of school improvement is 80 percent complete by the time the plans are written.

Another communication strategy involves bringing all of the superintendents together about halfway through the process to brief them on what the teams are doing, what they are learning and what they want to do next. Through this meeting, superintendents can get new ideas and form relationships with other administrators.

At the end of the planning phase, the school teams present their plans to the superintendents and to school board members, who approve the plans and make commitments to the implementation phase. "These plans are designed to jump-start improvement," Lambert said.

- **Implementing the plan.** New members join the school planning team, which is organized into four to seven task forces to work on aspects of the plan such as curriculum revision, staff development, use of data and parental involvement.

Lambert has identified three conditions that are critical to high schools' success in writing school improvement plans:

- The support of *High Schools That Work;*
- A regional structure to break down barriers; and
- A team of outside experts to help schools develop and implement their plans.

HSTW sites in the Cincinnati area have benefited greatly from the joint planning experience. Principals meet regularly to identify common issues and to seek support; schools have built bridges to other schools and to the business community. Parental involvement has increased.

In the future, the regional coordinator will enable the Cincinnati-area schools to share their experiences with schools in other parts of the state. He also will work closely with the schools to ensure that the teams continue to function and to help the schools become "winners." Leaders from the district level are being enlisted as "mentors" to support school leaders and teachers as they make changes.

The Relationship Between the Site Coordinator and the Principal

The principal at many *HSTW* sites also serves as the site coordinator, making this person's role critical to the site's success. Principals of effective *HSTW* sites need to envision what the school can become and what the students can achieve. Successful principals need a strong commitment to the *HSTW* goals and key practices and the ability to lead and organize the staff into a comprehensive reform effort. The principal also should have the "ear" of the school board and the district office to secure financial and organizational resources for school and classroom changes.

When the site coordinator is not the principal, he or she may need special talents and techniques to get the principal to support needed staff development, technical assistance and networking/communication. At successful *HSTW* sites, the coordinator works closely with the principal to keep the school moving toward its improvement goals. The coordinator can encourage the principal to attend conferences and workshops with teachers, to make presentations at the annual *HSTW* Summer Staff Development Conference and to host groups of teachers and counselors from other schools.

Communication is the key. It is important for the site coordinator to keep the principal informed about the school team's activities and the ideas and strategies gained by attending staff development events or by visiting other schools. A successful coordinator will meet with the principal to discuss new approaches that the school may want to take and to encourage the principal to allocate more money for professional development and resource materials.

The site coordinator will want to enlist the principal's support in featuring *HSTW* at faculty meetings. When teachers know that the principal is behind an effort, they are more apt to become involved. Enthusiastic participation by teachers makes the site coordinator's job easier.

Using Technology to Network

The Internet, e-mail and other high-tech advances are making networking quicker, easier and less expensive. Sites, states and the SREB are connected through high-tech methods that increase the potential for information exchange. For example:

- The SREB's Web site (www.sreb.org) contains descriptions of outstanding practices from *HSTW* sites and lists the name of a contact person and a phone number for each of those schools. Pace-setting schools will be listed so that teachers from other schools can plan to visit them. Other networking aids on the Web site include a calendar of events and a list of *HSTW* staff members and their e-mail addresses.
- Many states have computer networks that give schools easy access to information provided by the state department of education. By logging onto the state Web site, schools can locate exemplary sites, check a calendar of staff development activities and other events, and read descriptions of outstanding practices. Some states include a *High Schools That Work* section on their Web pages.
- Schools increasingly are creating their own Web sites that contain information they want to share with other schools and the public. The SREB distributed lists of school Web sites at the 1997 and 1998 *HSTW* Summer Staff Development Conferences.
- Teachers and administrators use e-mail to pose questions and receive quick answers from knowledgeable sources. States can send e-mail messages to *HSTW* sites simultaneously. The

SREB also receives and responds to inquiries from schools via e-mail.

- An e-mail feature known as "listserv" is a high-tech way to share ideas and discuss issues with a number of people at the same time. The SREB used listserve to communicate with teachers who attended a *HSTW* workshop on writing syllabi for vocational courses. Participants in listserv can see the questions and responses of every person on the list.
- Some states use distance learning capabilities that enable teachers to focus on a common topic or problem. These satellite and cable transmissions reach out to teachers in every corner of the state.
- The SREB and some states conduct interactive videoconferences to give teachers access to school improvement experts and to each other. The state coordinator in Kentucky arranges an annual videoconference for coordinators from all sites that will host technical assistance visits during the school year. The Kentucky Department of Education has videoconferencing capability, and the schools either have the technology or have access to it at a nearby community college.

To make it easier for teachers and administrators to network electronically, some states sponsor staff development sessions on the use of technology to communicate with others in the state or nation. The SREB has offered Internet training sessions at the annual *HSTW* Summer Staff Development Conference.

Conclusion

School improvement can be hard work that requires a strong commitment by the entire faculty. The easier it is to network, the more likely schools will do so. The SREB and the states are dedicated to helping *HSTW* sites use all available resources, participate actively in statewide and school-to-school networks, and make decisions that improve student achievement.

> *"A major benefit from being a member of* High Schools That Work *is networking — not just with schools in our state, but across the nation as well. A week never goes by that we do not receive letters and phone calls from other* HSTW *sites."*
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> Janell Crosslin
> Istrouma High School and Technology Magnet
> Baton Rouge, La.